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NASA'S MARS HELICOPTER TAKES FLIGHT

NASA's experimental helicopter Ingenuity rose into the thin air above the dusty red surface of Mars on Monday, achieving the first powered flight by an aircraft on another planet. The triumph was hailed as a Wright Brothers moment. The mini 1.8-kg copter even carried a bit of wing fabric from the 1903 Wright Flyer, which made similar history at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. P14

18+ PART OF LIBERALISED VAX REGIME

To be effective from May 1; states can procure directly from manufacturers, who can also sell in open market; up to states, private players to procure foreign jabs

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

HEEDING to calls to reduce the age cap, the Centre on Monday opened its phase 3 vaccination drive to include all above 18 years of age from May 1, after a series of meetings Prime Minister Narendra Modi had with different stakeholders.

It also substantially eased its grip on vaccine manufacturers, empowering them to release up to 50% of their stock to states aa also sell the jabs in the open market at a pre-declared price. Importantly, foreign made ready-to-use vaccines will be available only in the market or procured by states but not by the Centre. States have also been permitted to procure additional vaccine doses directly from the manufacturers, and open up vaccination to any category of people above the age of 18 for it.

Prominent among those who had pressed the Centre to expand the beneficiary basket were chief ministers Amarinder Singh (Punjab) and Uddhav Thackeray (Maharashtra). The decision to allow everyone above 18 years to get the vaccines also came on a day when the Centre reportedly extended a credit line of ₹3,000 crore to the Pune-based Serum Institute of India and ₹1,500 crore to Bharat Biotech.

Manufacturers will make an advance declaration of the price for 50% supply that will be available to states and in the market, before May 1. Based on this price, state governments, private hospitals and industrial establishments among others can procure doses from the manufacturers. Private hospitals have to procure their supplies exclusively from the 50% earmarked for other than the Central government channel.

"This would augment vaccine production as well as availability, incentivising vaccine manufacturers to rapidly ramp up their production as well as attract new vaccine manufacturers, domestic and international. It would also make pricing, procurement, eligibility and administration of vaccines open and flexible, allowing all stakeholders the flexibility to customise to local needs and dynamics," said the Centre.

All vaccinations, however, will be part of the national vaccination programme, and mandated to follow all protocols such as being captured on CoWIN platform, linked to Adverse Event Following Immunisation reporting and all other prescribed norms.

Also, the second dose of all existing priority groups wherever it has become due, will be given priority.

NATIONWIDE	APRIL 18	APRIL 19
Fresh cases	2,61,500	2,72,191
Recoveries	1,38,423	1,44,178
Deaths	1,501	1,619

Migrant workers at Kaushambi bus stand on the Delhi-UP border to board buses for their native places on Monday | PARVEEN NEGI

Harsh Vardhan mocks MMS, Cong hits back

ENS @ New Delhi

REACTING sharply to former PM Manmohan Singh's letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi giving suggestions on how to tide over the pandemic, Union health minister Harsh Vardhan on Monday said even Congress-ruled states don't seem to agree with him.

"It is saddening, Dr Singh, that while you very well understand the importance of vaccination as an important method of fighting the Covid-19 battle, people in responsible positions in your party as well as in the state governments formed by your party do not seem to share your view," Vardhan wrote in his reply to Singh. P9

MANMOHAN TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID

Former PM Manmohan Singh, 88, on Monday tested positive for Covid-19. He was admitted to All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi with a mild fever on Monday afternoon. He is stable and doctors are monitoring his condition. Singh had taken both the doses of Covid vaccine. PM Narendra Modi was among those who wished him speedy recovey

Corona warrior scheme to be continued: Govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has clarified that the government is in talks with another insurance company for extension of the ₹50 lakh cover scheme for healthcare workers on Covid-19 duty, under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package.

Launched last year, this scheme was discontinued according to a letter to the states from Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan. The letter said the insurance coverage was coming to an end on March 24 this year. In its clarification, the health ministry has added that it has been extended till April 24.

The ministry said a "new dispensation will be provided to cover the Corona warriors, for which the ministry is in talks with the insurance company (New India Assurance)".

STATES LOOK AT MORE CURBS, LOCKDOWN

With Covid cases rising unabated, several states have announced stricter curbs. Delhi announced a six-day lockdown from Monday. The Allahabad and Telangana HCs have told UP and Telangana, respectively, to impose stricter restrictions to contain the spread.

K'TAKA BATTLES THE SECOND WAVE

12.81% Positivity rate on April 19	13,497 Total deaths	71,17,405 Vaccinations so far
0.92% Day's case fatality rate	1,23,212 Total samples tested on April 19	

Governor Vajubhai Vala to preside over all-party meeting today

Bengaluru going out of control warns epidemiologist

BBMP plans mobile testing

Netas against lockdown, new guidelines today

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

A meeting of Bengaluru MLAs, MLCs, MPs and ministers of all parties to discuss the Covid-19 situation in the State capital ended in uncertainty, after the government decided to announce new guidelines only post an all-party virtual meeting scheduled to take place on Tuesday. Governor Vajubhai Vala will head the virtual meeting, where leaders of opposition parties will also participate.

Revenue Minister R Ashoka, who chaired the meeting, as well as Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa who joined via video conference, said all suggestions had been noted and will be considered. Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa, who is hospitalised due to Covid reinfection, joined the meeting via video conference.

The three-hour meeting on Monday witnessed elected representatives from Bengaluru highlighting issues plaguing citizens at a time cases are surging by the thousands. Issues of extending night curfew from 8pm, imposing Section 144 to contain gatherings, identifying additional places for cremation etc, were discussed. Opposition legislators pulled up the government over the alleged shortage of beds, ventilators, medicines as well as oxygen supply.

"There is no shortage of oxygen in the State but hospitals that don't have storage facility and are dependent on cylinders are facing difficulties with supplies. We have appointed nodal officers to ensure cylinders are supplied thrice a day to such hospitals so there is no shortage," said Ashoka. P4

STATEWIDE	APRIL 18	APRIL 19
Fresh cases	19,067	15,785
Active cases	1,33,543	1,42,084
Deaths	81	146
Recoveries	4,603	7,098
Fresh cases in B'luru Urban	12,793	9,618

K'taka gasps for oxygen, CM writes to Centre

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

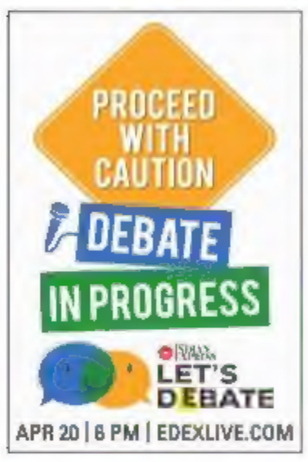
CHIEF Minister B S Yediyurappa and Chief Secretary P Ravi Kumar have written to the Central Government to increase the allocation of medical grade oxygen supply to the state after the Centre capped the quota to 300 metric tons of oxygen per day for Karnataka. This is much less than the present requirement, said sources in the know of the matter.

"There are seven liquid oxygen plants in Karnataka which, together, manufacture around 812 metric tons of oxygen per day. Out of this, the Centre has allocated only 300 tons to the state. The rest of the oxygen will be distributed to other states as per Central allocation. This is just not enough for the state, which is grappling with an acute shortage of oxygen.

CONTINUED ON: P6

Adding to the curve

Karnataka is among 10 states that account for 78.58% of new cases in the country.



EXPRESS READ

Lexicographer Prof GV dies at 107

Bengaluru: Noted lexicographer, Kannada writer and critic Professor Ganjam Venkatasubbaiah died in Bengaluru on Monday morning. He was 107. The recipient of numerous awards including Padma Shri, Kannada Sahitya Akademi and Pampa Award, he was an eminent academician and a noted orator as well. His book 'Kannada Nighantu Shastra Parichaya' and 'Klishtapada Kosha' earned much acclaim in the Kannada literary circle. P7

Markets in tailspin amidst pandemic woes

Mumbai: The Sensex plunged 883 points while the Nifty crashed below the 14,400-level on Monday as the worsening Covid situation triggered an across-the-board selloff. Fresh lockdowns announced by some states have stoked concerns over recovery, while another sharp drop in rupee also weighed on risk appetite.

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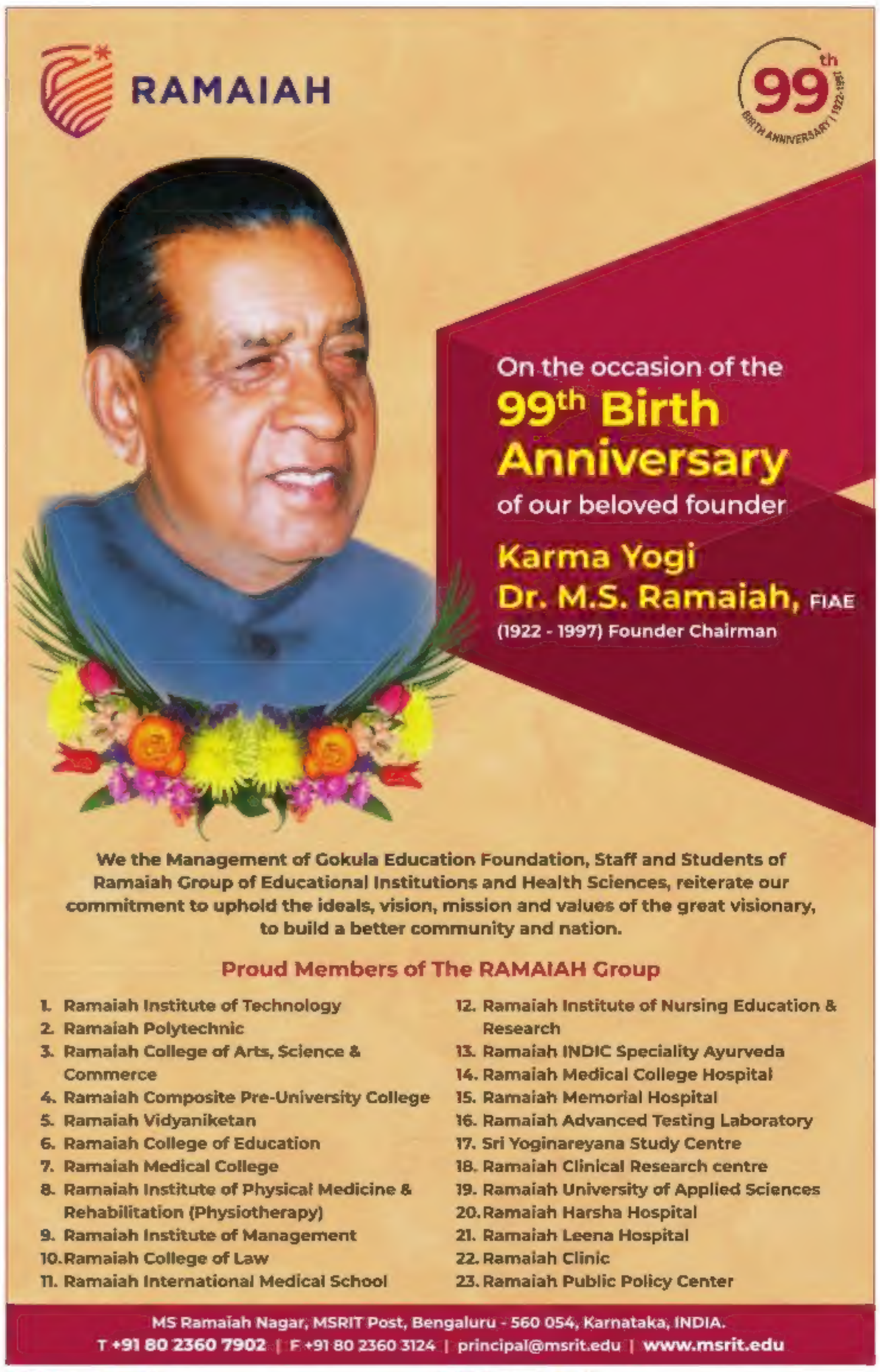
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